Conclusion

Whose line is it Anyway?

Into whose culture is one to be hybridized and on whose terms? The willful relegation of this question reveals nevertheless that the underlying logic of this celebratory mode is that of the limitless freedom of a globalized marketplace which pretends that all consumers are equally resourceful and in which all cultures are equally available for consumption, in any combination that the consumer desires. Only to the extent that all cultures are encountered in commodified forms does it become possible to claim that none commands more power than any other or that the consumer alone is the sovereign of all hybridization. This playful ‘hybridity’ conceals that fact that commodified cultures are equal only to the extent of their commodification.

– Ahmad, ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’ 17

The new global cultural system promotes difference instead of suppressing it, but selects the dimension of difference. . . . [We] are not all becoming the same, but we are portraying, dramatizing and communicating our differences to each other in ways that are more widely intelligible . . . which celebrate particular kinds of diversity while submerging, deflating or suppressing others.

– Wilk 124

People are not in charge of globalization; markets and technology are. Certain human actions might accelerate or retard globalization, but in the last instance . . . the invisible hand of the market will always assert its superior wisdom.

– Steger, Globalization: The New Market Ideology 61

What is it in third-world identity that despite rigorous debates on issues related to it the term still manages to remain a fertile subject of research? What forces scholars to discuss this issue constantly? Why is there only one conclusion about identity that there can be no conclusion? And if every study of identity comes to the same conclusion, why is the subject still
researched upon? There is only one answer to all these questions. Identity is of immense significance to all human beings individually as well as socially. It is not a dated concept which loses its relevance with time. As the world changes in its economy, politics, technology, social structure and culture, identity reflects those changes and this makes the concept an organic and evolving category which cannot be relegated to discussions of a certain age alone. Similarly, the term ‘third-world’ may be considered obsolete, but what it signifies cannot be dismissed as unimportant. As elaborated before, the term ‘third-world’ not only denotes erstwhile colonies, but also the contemporary developing nations. On a different tangent, ‘third-world’ can also be read as ‘third space’ denoting the space of cultural interface and hybridization which is far more inclusive and global. Together, third-world identity may always be defined as an inconclusive subject. The method and reasons for arriving at that conclusion may be different, but productive in lending some understanding of the concept.

As illustrated in the chapters before, third-world identity has always been a category of manipulative representation. This study begins with an assertion that the act of naming is a means of hegemonic intervention. Identity is a mode of executing power and of perpetuating authority. The construction of identity, in both polarized and hybridized forms, is informed by the hegemony of a power group. Through the investigation of identity and representational politics, one can assess that identity is not only an expression of being for itself but for the express purpose of establishing certain relations of hierarchy and authority. The study of identity through Said and Bhabha leads us to the question of the indubitable significance of power structures. The inevitable question then is: Whose line is it anyway?

In 1988, BBC and Channel 4 aired a game show Whose Line is it Anyway? which was a tremendous success and is still a chart-topping comedy on prime-time television. The show format involves a random simulation of situations by four comedians. Prompted by the demands of a live audience, the host selects situations which are to be performed and provides them to a supposedly unprepared group of artists, who portray different parts impromptu, in a mimicking/mocking style and create humour for the audiences. They are given points by the host simply on his whim as the catch-line suggests that it is a show in which ‘everything is made up and the points don’t matter’.

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In the absence of a conclusion to the competition, the game may be seen as a superficial contest progressing on popular demand and co-operative effort. But beneath its pretence of a non-hierarchical format, the show exhibits the working of a complex power structure. The live audience is given an ostensible position of authority as they demand the situations to be performed and the humour is generated for their entertainment. But neither is their demand unrestricted, nor is the humour rated by them, so their authority is not absolute even though it may seem so. Much like a Shakespearean fool, the comedian has the authority to represent situations and people with ingenuity without being challenged by those being mocked. With an enormous talent for changing personalities and imitating/mocking them with utmost ease, the comedian, or the fool is a competing participant on the one hand and the ruling centre-stage-holding narrative authority on the other. But subject to the judgment of the host, the comedian’s authority is challenged. Further, since the competition never ends, the comedian is constantly maintained in the position of a competitor. The host who maintains the pretence of a facilitator between the audience and the comedians holds the most powerful position. It is the host who selects the situations prompted by the audience and rates the performance of the comedians, maintaining his unchallenged authority in every show.

Like the show, the conclusion for this thesis is titled ‘Whose Line is it Anyway?’ The show can be seen as a molecular caricature of the systems of globalization. The consumer, like the audience, is given the illusion of control even though the first world, as a host in the game of globalization, controls the demand and supply. The third world, as a competitor, takes on various roles, only to be rated by the first world on its whim in a format that never allows the competition to end or the power structure to change. The third world as a licensed fool is given the illusive authority to mock/imitate, but the real authority rests with the first-world host who controls the consumer demand, the third-world performance and the hierarchy of the system. The first world constantly maintains an illusion of authority for the audience as well as the third world, which is pertinent to run the show in a certain manner. In this seemingly symbiotic structure however, the questions remain: Whose line is it anyway? Is the line or authority that of the directing first world, the competing third world, or the consumer? What is the identity of the third world as a constant competitor and imitator? What is the identity of the first world whose authority is disguised under the garb of a go-between host? What is the dynamic of the power
structure which allows partial authority to others but never enough to subvert the format of the show?

Hierarchies and power structures have lost the clarity and strength they held in colonial times. The polar categories of master and slave were unchallenged then and could be populated without inviting much debate. The construction of identity was the sole prerogative of the colonizer. With the anti-colonial movements taking shape, third-world identity as a discursive colonial artefact came to be challenged and alternative accounts of native identity came to the fore. With colonial interaction and its many outcomes ranging from outright antagonism to steadfast devotion, from mimicry to mockery, an ambivalent attitude towards western constructs developed and resulted in various representations of third-world identity. With the crumbling of the space-time construct and the simultaneous development of the experiential tangent, the invasion of virtual lives and parallel existence systems, the economic boomerang effect of shifting binaries and the forever migrating peoples and cultures, third-world identity has acquired a complex structure which can also lead some to suggest that no one is in charge anymore. But a system of sustained hybridization cannot function without a directing power no matter how layered or multiple it may be.

On the surface, the most visible and the popular effect on identity is that of consumption. Consumption is often identified as one of the primary factors affecting identity and with the global availability of consumer products the world over, it is often construed that global capitalism and consumerism design the identity for the third world. Multinational and transnational corporations manufacture an identity for the consumer and popularize it through advertising strategies and marketing systems. With these corporations supplying their products to all corners of the world, one can be forced to assume that the third space is becoming “homogenously hybridized” with the same set of brands from various locations available for a buyer who is being transformed into a standard hybridized consumer irrespective of his/her location. The visibility effects of the mall or the sign boards in the cosmopolitan cities can lead one to simplistically understand that the identity of the third world is that of a “homogenously hybridized” consumer created in the picture of the first world. This ostensible replication of the first-world market in the third world can be seen as a capitalistic form of the hegemony of colonialism and the effort to create an in-between class, as Macaulay once intended, which can
forward the culture of the neocolonial master and reinforce its inevitability. However one must consider whether the presence of the same brands everywhere necessarily translates into a homogenizing identity effect.

Firstly, this worldwide visibility of brands and their popularity is primarily depictive of global consumerism. One may find a Coca Cola banner everywhere in the world and a McDonalds at the end of the street in most cosmopolitan cities, but enormous disparities still divide nations from each other. From political borders to the formalities of international travel, from culture to language, great differences can be observed in seemingly similar parts of the world. The presence of the same international brands all over the world only signifies a well ordered and managed distribution system of the multinational corporate and only superficially informs identity (Gopinath 49). This is not to suggest that identity or culture remain unchanged under the impact of globalization, but that hybridization of identity is not a function of consumption alone. Secondly, most multinational companies adapt themselves to suit international clientele. The brand and the advertising equipment remaining constant, the same companies provide localized products to increase international sales and profit. So McDonalds serves ‘Aloo Tikki Burgers’ in India and Hamburgers in USA. From using local heroes and models to advertise their product to changing the design, products and services of their brand, the multinational companies themselves become hybridized rather than hybridizing the local culture as much. Once again, one must clarify that the very presence of a McDonalds may be a symbol of hybridization, but the fact that it has to evolve its own strategies and products substantiates that the corporate cannot survive globally without acknowledging deep-rooted cultural differences. If identity were to be observed vis-à-vis consumption, globalization would not imply homogenization but rather glocalization and cultural intermingling. Thirdly, and most importantly, if consumption of a transnational or multinational brand such as Coca Cola has a direct bearing on the identity of the consumer and creates a homogenizing effect, consumption of all brands and products acquired as a result of global trade should be observed similarly. The post 9/11 image of Osama bin Laden on Al Jazeera channel (refer: image below), telecast worldwide through tie-ups with international corporations such as AOL-Warner, CNN, CNBC, Reuters and ABC, should be read as an example of homogeneity and not aggressive measures of a terrorist protesting against capitalism. Laden himself, sporting a microphone, a stylish Timex
sports watch, a Russian combat dress and an AK-47 that must have travelled half the world to reach the regresses of a cave in Afghanistan (Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* 4-6), should belong to the same third-world identity of a “homogenized consumer” and not be categorized as a terrorist.

It seems unfair to cast Coca Cola as an agent of homogenization and AK-47 as that of fanaticism, when they are both attained through the system of global “trade”. The example given may sound too incongruent but products and brands can only be observed as factors affecting life-style and not as codes of identity. It may also be mentioned here that the image of Laden as both a consumer of diverse goods which can be read as symbols of globalization and a terroristic force against the tyrannies of American capitalism, bears testimony to the fact that identity is not a manifestation of consumption alone. It would be too simplistic to assume that Laden would be
naive enough to be sporting articles acquired through global trade, when making a statement
against international capitalism perpetrated by America, without a specific agenda. A
deconstruction of Laden’s image brings out a duality in the identity of the terrorist as both a
consumer of goods of international trade, as well as a force of resistance against capitalism. One
may also read Laden’s image as a symbol of resistance by the employment of the means of the
colonizer. The multiple interpretations of the image suggest that the identity of the third-world,
even in a fanatic/terroristic form, is hybridized but not by a global standard of hybridity.

Like global capitalism, America is also perceived as an important player in writing third-
world identity. The politics of representation is somehow always linked with the west and its
hegemonic practices. Where colonial occupation is seen as a direct form of imperialism, the
development of multinational capitalism and hybridization are seen as indirect forms of
Americanization. It is no surprise then that third-world identity and culture are generally
perceived to be threatened under the impact of ‘westernization’ or ‘Americanization’ through
hybridization, movement or capitalistic liaison in the world today. Can it be concluded then, that
it is America or the west that holds the reins? Is identity America’s line?

In the current context and the jargon of neocolonialism, America is perceived as a
colonizer and the third world as the colonized. In a Saidean manner it can be said that third-
world identity is facing the same orientalism at the hands of America as the colonized other did
under European control. The othering of the east as an inferior is done to discursively create an
unshakeable position of superiority for the western self. The American system of othering as a
discursive practice can be observed in its literature. Through its films and media, America
reinforces a strong international belief in eastern ignorance and western knowledge in contrast
with it. Whether it is the projection of the bombing of Iraq and Afghanistan as a difficult but
important task in international interest that America has to undertake as part of the ‘White Man’s
burden’ (Kipling 280), or the Hollywood films demonstrating the east as the inferior other:
illiterate, primitive, violent and aimless, America does it all. On the cultural front, America
creates its self through narcissistic accounts of prowess compared to a world of the doomed
other. Like the European colonizer, America seems to be out to subjugate the world with the
sword (military power) in one hand and the book (media) in the other. Interestingly, rather than
resisting the American discourse of eastern inferiority, the third-world intentionally or
unintentionally reiterates it. Talking in terms of cinema alone, third world countries re-exoticize themselves in attempts to earn international profits. Ang Lee’s Chinese international blockbuster *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* once again ‘orientalize[s]’ Chinese culture and history to suit the American sensibilities (Ritzer 86). Similarly Indian entries to the Oscars continue to reflect a sense of mysticism with movies like Amol Palekar’s *Paheli*. It is because of this discursive representation that America continues to locate ‘slumdog millionaires’ (Boyle) in India. By creating and strengthening a discourse of American superiority and indispensability in world systems, the USA seems to claim the sole rights to write the identity of the third world.

Politically it may be right to observe that America holds a position of enviable superiority today. With its stronghold in the area of creating and disseminating knowledge, America claims a powerful position by Foucauldian principles. Along with a strong political position in the international space, America also commands a ruling position in areas of economy and technology. With its claims to superiority in these spheres one may hastily deduce that third-world identity is an American design. In terms of economy, America seemingly controls the functioning of the international market scenario. With the World Bank, the WTO and the IMF in America, the dynamics of international economy are ostensibly in the hands of the American entrepreneur. With the largest number of transnational corporations (TNCs) based in North America (Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* 103), it is evident that world economy is controlled largely by the U.S.A. It has been demonstrated before that economy bears a direct effect on identity and that supply dominates demand in the world today. In such a scenario, American economic policy is one that creates demand by overflowing third-world markets first with loans from the World Bank and then with supplies that can be bought with them. Based on such a supply-demand function, one may erroneously conclude that the third world is the sedated consumer of American production, demanding only what has been offered and playing the part of an unobtrusive object at the hands of American whims. The inversion of the economic principle of demand and supply and increasing significance of production can be read as a means of creating passive identity. One may conclude that third-world identity is a direct consequence of third-world consumption which is controlled and manipulated by the American corporate dynamic. But a patient observation of the parameters of American supremacy contest the absolute authority granted to it.
The American corporate system is dependent on the third world for cheap intellectual labour. The third-world slave working in the coffee plantations could be cast as an essentialist symbol of colonial subjugation but the white collared third-world employee in the first world holds an ambivalent position in the hierarchical order. On the one hand he/she is the agent of forwarding first-world profit, but on the other hand he/she is also the ‘job snatcher’ in the first-world employee market who is taking away the means of first-world sustenance (Chanda 291). On the one hand, the third world is the developing world trying to catch up with the first-world progress while on the other hand it is the intellectual labour reaping the benefits of the system of outsourcing and predating on the western employee. The ambivalence of the self and the other could never be as complete. The first-world is both the controller of trade and capitalism in the position of entrepreneurship and also the victim in the game of outsourcing. Similarly the third world is both the labour/slave but also the base of western development. These ambivalent hierarchies make the concept of third-world identity all the more slippery and hard to pin.

However, it must be stated that globalization only affects hierarchies to the extent of theoretical rhetoric. With the debt-trap strangulating third-world economies, the wealth gap widening between the rich and the poor and the imbalanced rates of development observed both internationally and intra-nationally, and contrastingly the growing fiscal reserves of transnational corporations, the audaciously dictatorial attitude of the USA in matters of international politics and economics and the inarguable discursive superiority of the west as opposed to the east, it is evident that globalization is a means to promote corporate growth which translates as American growth as the US commands a stronghold in the corporate sector. The empowerment of the third world is restricted to the extent of superficial participation alone, while the actual authority still rests undisputedly with the first world entrepreneur.

Along with global capitalism and America, the Internet is observed as another designer of identity. The Internet provides a seemingly equal space to all “netizens” who can migrate from site to site and from time zone to time zone without any formalities or stipulations and can change as many identities as possible. From politics to religion, from education to love, from environment to crime, from trade to terrorism, the World Wide Web creates a virtual image of the world in imitation deleting all those restrictions which challenge the flow of globalization in the real space. However, it is interesting to note that the virtual world with its virtual dynamic
manages to create reality effects in the real world. The Internet is the backbone of world
development today and the capital of the communication industry. With the Internet and its
allied services the world runs its business today. From employing labour across the globe to
selling products off the net, from delivering on lightening fast communication highways to
facilitating execution of power: both governmental and terroristic, the Internet is the greatest tool
of globalizing the world. The identity that the World Wide Web offers to all its users is neutral.
All over the world, these users can code their identity as they please and can migrate across
identity borders as and when they want. The euphoria of globalization can be seen realized only
on the World Wide Web. But precisely because of this fluidity and the absolute lack of authority
on the Internet, the identities remain virtual like the space on which they are created. The lack of
tangibility in identity matters on the Internet makes it only a reflection of identity as it may
aspire to be, but not a reality. Further, the Internet is a common platform of contesting authorities
and only works as a medium of expression. To be able to create an identity it has to have a voice
of its own too. If the discourse of American supremacy is spread through the World Wide Web,
the greatest symbol of euphoric globalization, anti-globalizers also find a voice in the same
medium. Like Achebe and Raja Rao appropriated English language and used it to create counter-
narratives, anti-Americans and anti-globalizers also express their opinions through the Internet.
The Internet only offers a compressed virtual image of what the world expresses in all its
heterogeneity, but it does not express an ideology of its own. The World Wide Web truly
exemplifies globalization and offers much freedom to the construction of identity in global
terms, but its virtual nature is self refuting and in the absence of a certain authority, identity is
not entirely an Internet phenomenon either.

In a world where everything from trade, culture, environment, education and media to
terrorism, war, disease and crises are globalized, identity cannot be any different. A globalizing
view may be suggestive of a global identity of “third-space dwellers” working towards symbiotic
trade development and profit generation through methods which necessitate cultural
homogenization and subscription to common consumptive ethics that determine a globally
hybridized identity. Anything differing from that globally acceptable hybridized form may be
seen as a polar opposite, a threat to development, an anti-establishment force: be it an agent of
aggressive resistance or an expression of nativity. In the world of real interaction however,
hybridization remains a heterogeneous global phenomenon. Third-world identity must not be defined as a “homogenously hybridized” category but as a fluid and ambivalent concept susceptible to influence and differing in reaction or response. Even if people consume the same products, wear the same kind of clothes, work with international companies, maintain cosmopolitan linkages and live an array of lives on the virtual planes of the Internet, they remain different, at times even antagonistic. It can be said then, that third-world identity is not constructed by any one power-group in isolation. It reflects an amalgamation of diverse influences including those of globalization and hybridization on the one hand and ethnification and nationalization on the other.

Hybridity as well as ethnicity are at once homogenous and differentiated. Hybridity can be homogenous in microcosmic terms of the functioning of the mall culture and differentiated at the global level of appropriation of global consumerism. Similarly, ethnicity can be homogenous in terms of terrorist attempts at fanaticism and differentiated in terms of revival cultures that function through the appropriation of ethnicity to international tastes. The carnival of the world is such that identities are articulated on cue and the multi-affiliated personalities of the populace take on characters and hierarchical positions as per the shifting loci of the world order. The multiple ambivalences of situations and peoples allows for a diverse set of identities that can be taken on. Third-world identity is once again an inconclusive term and one cannot really ascertain whose line it is anyway. It is more layered and relative than ever before and resists any final definition or even a partial closure of the process that it is. Between the cosmopolitanism of the world markets and the active migration culture, the terrorist attempts at establishing unique ethnic identities and the jargon of global oneness and equality, third-world identity, in all possible meanings of the term, signifies a range of identities performed on call. The polarity of identities is visible in the interactions of various communities and so is their homogeneity.

Meanwhile it must be mentioned that the classical discourses about the third world still hold strong. Despite the euphoric assertions of globalization, differences are still highlighted with a sense of discrimination and contempt. The discourse of globalization underlines the ostensible claim of inclusivity and dilution of differences to bring the world together. The forces of capitalism thrive on the promise of unity in diversity. But the following Benetton poster, titled ‘Angel and Devil’, with the standard thematic idea of ‘unity in diversity’ explodes the myth of
equality. The image portrays the blue-eyed white child as a happy and magnanimous angel and the black child as a roguish devil with horns made out of his natural hair. The children are portrayed as hugging each other, which implies that the first world is generously accepting the third world but the irredeemable devilishness of the latter is nonetheless undeniable. The expression of the black child displays a sort of indifference and thanklessness while that of the white child is full of cheer and enthusiasm. This image bares the discourse of globalization, which includes the erstwhile discourses of orientalism. The discursive construct of third-world identity then becomes a paradoxical category of classical mysteriousness and predictable consumption, incorrigible ignorance and 'job snatching' intellect, fanatic terrorism and victimized subalternity. The image of globalization may be inclusive but it is evocative of discursive differences. Discourses about the third world are still rampant and voiced through Hollywood films, international news, blogs and even Play-Station games, especially after 9/11. Discursive images are still popular: Islamic terrorists, women as veiled and hence oppressed,
Indian call-centre capability, Chinese markets selling cheap products and the Big Brother America watching all and controlling the actions of the inmates of his house of globalization.

The world may have come to a point where difference is expected, but it is still discursively branded. Anti-globalization movements and anti-establishment efforts reflect a resistance to discursive categorization which is still prevalent in the era of globalization. We need to understand that we live in a world in which identity can never be singularly defined. The search for a defined and recognizable identity is a primordial urge in human beings. In a world that challenges any and all efforts at even a partial or temporal signification, this urge is heightened. It is important to understand that identity is not a homogenous and/or timeless construct, both for the self and the other. Identity is a loosely bound and constantly mutating space of recognition, affiliation and differentiation. It is further susceptible to influences of experience and constantly developing difference. Any such difference must not be tolerated but rather accepted as a facet of the organic identification process. Finally, it is time for us to stop branding our differences as acceptable or unacceptable. What is required of us is to reject any such discourse that begins by categorizing peoples and by segregating on the ground of essentialist definitions. In the age of globalization, only a global acceptance of difference can prove productive.